

Statement of
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On

Telework & Continuity of Operations (COOP) planning by Federal agencies

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Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. On behalf of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), I appear before you today to discuss Federal agency use of telework and its inclusion in Federal agencies' Continuity of Operations (COOP) planning. I am Marta Brito Pérez, Associate Director for Human Capital Leadership and Merit System Accountability. It is my responsibility to work with the agencies to ensure they have focused their attention on this critical aspect of their COOP planning. This committee has been consistent in its emphasis on the importance of telework and its significant benefits, and its heightened importance following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. I am pleased to report to you that OPM has played an important role in helping agencies recognize the need to incorporate human capital flexibilities into their COOP plans. OPM's role is to ensure that the Federal workforce, as well as the emergency planners for Federal agencies, are aware of the various human capital tools, such as telework, to support emergency planning. This role complements the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) primary responsibility in ensuring Federal agencies perform adequate emergency planning and COOP activities.

Your April 18, 2005, letter of invitation asked us to focus on two areas: (1) telework as an essential element of Federal agencies' COOP planning, and also (2) describe how OPM communicates how telework needs to be an indispensable component of agency emergency preparedness plans.

Telework As An Essential Element Of Federal Agencies' COOP Planning

In response to your first question regarding Federal agencies' COOP planning, it is undisputed that in the aftermath of September 11, telework has become a matter of necessity for many employees and employers. While you and other members of

Congress have long recognized the benefits of telework in reducing traffic congestion and air pollution, in addition to its positive impact on employee morale and retention, we have all come to recognize the important role telework plays in agencies' ability to continue to perform mission-critical work in times of crisis or calamity.

Additionally, as a result of weather disasters such as the devastating series of hurricanes that struck Florida and other Southeastern states in 2004, we received reports of Federal agencies using telework arrangements. Telework has become an integral part of the Federal Government's COOP program and there is evidence agencies are including it in their own agency COOP plans.

To further reinforce its importance, in June 2004, FEMA revised its Federal Preparedness Circular (FPC) 65, "Federal Executive Branch COOP" to require agencies to consider Human Capital management in their planning for emergencies. This circular's Annex H emphasizes telework as an important tool as well as the need to address emergency situations in teleworking agreements. The circular was issued by FEMA with consultation and cooperation from OPM.

Using a train-the-trainer approach, OPM has partnered with FEMA to deliver Human Capital-oriented emergency preparedness training to agencies' COOP managers. Thus far we have provided training in each of FEMA's ten regions. This ongoing FEMA-sponsored COOP training includes an OPM segment on the various human capital "tools" available to Federal planners through their human resources staff to ensure the continued operation of Federal agencies during a crisis. Telework is identified in the training as an important tool for emergency planners to use in developing schemes to leverage the capabilities of the Federal workforce during times of crisis and potential disruption.

How OPM Communicates Telework As An Indispensable Component Of Agency Emergency Preparedness Plans

In response to your second question regarding communication of the importance of telework in Agency emergency preparedness plans, the events of September 11, 2001, demonstrated the need for comprehensive emergency planning to ensure the essential functions of Government continue to operate efficiently in times of crisis. Shortly after 9/11, OPM began working with the Federal Executive Boards (FEBs) to improve communication capability focused on emergency preparedness.

In 2002, OPM identified emergency planning as an integral component of human capital management with the agencies. In 2003, OPM administered the first annual Emergency Preparedness survey to assess the extent to which agencies were considering emergency planning, shelter-in-place, securing the workforce, with particular attention to those with special needs, and the flexibilities and tools available to managers in their Emergency Preparedness plans. Following completion of this first survey, OPM held several briefings in Washington, DC metropolitan area, to share the results with the senior management representatives from the agencies.

In preparation for the 2004 Republican and Democratic National Conventions, OPM conducted emergency preparedness surveys in Boston, Massachusetts and New York, New York. Based on these survey results, OPM developed human capital training to support emergency planning, in partnership with FEMA, the General Services Administration (GSA), and others, for these National Special Security Events which included the use of telework. This tool provided an option for maintaining government services during the conventions while reducing the number of employees reporting to the secured areas. OPM strongly encouraged the use of scheduling flexibilities to reduce employee presence within the secured areas.

OPM has developed a human capital perspective component as part of FEMA's two and one-half day COOP training seminar. In addition, OPM has brought the Executive agencies together on a number of occasions to discuss emergency preparedness plans and to present telework as one important tool to continue Government operations during emergencies.

As you know, the Federal Government is geographically dispersed. Approximately 90 percent of over 1.8 million non-postal executive branch employees work outside of the Washington, DC metropolitan area. As such, OPM has been working with the Federal Executive Boards across the country to deliver emergency preparedness training to Federal employees throughout the Federal Government. Since October 2004, 22 training sessions focusing on the human capital "tools" available to Federal organizations in their emergency planning have been held. Again, as part of the training, OPM emphasizes the importance of a strong telework plan to provide Federal agencies the capacity to employ its workers outside their normal workplace when emergency circumstances dictate. To date, over 20 agencies have participated in the training sessions across the country.

In 2005, OPM has conducted three separate surveys, as well as a pilot survey covering the State of Texas, which touched on agencies' emergency planning and preparedness.

- **First, Emergency Preparedness Survey.** This survey conducted in 2003, 2004, and 2005 served a variety of purposes. First, the surveys provide the opportunity to evaluate agencies' efforts to ensure the safety of Federal employees. In addition, the surveys are a means to assess the state of agencies' progress in emergency planning and preparedness, and provide an excellent metric to evaluate agencies' efforts to disseminate information on its emergency preparedness operations as widely as possible throughout their workforces. The survey results have enabled OPM to identify and focus on human capital areas needing improvement in governmentwide emergency planning. Specifically, our 2004 Emergency Preparedness Survey results indicate 40 percent of the sixty-nine responding agencies were using Situational Telework (not regularly scheduled) in emergency planning and 35 percent were using Core Schedule Telework. Preliminary results of the 2005 annual survey indicate general improvement in most areas of emergency preparedness. The report will soon be available.

- **Second, OPM Annual Telework Survey.** OPM administered a 2005 survey to assess the agencies' use of telework in 2004. In 2005, OPM added one new question dealing with how agencies have incorporated telework into their emergency preparedness plans. The trends in past surveys indicate steady improvement, and we anticipate this will continue with the results of the 2005 survey. For example, the 2004 survey of 2003 telework activities showed that:
 - Ø 102,921 employees who have ever teleworked represents a 14 percent increase over the number in 2002.
 - Ø 61 percent of those employees that teleworked in 2003 were Core (telework that occurs on a routine or regular basis away from the principal place of duty, 1 or more days per week) and 39 percent were Situational (telework that occurs on an occasional, non-routine basis).
 - Ø Virtually all agencies have a telework policy in place which provides overarching guidance for the implementation of telework to support agency operations.
 - Ø The number of employees performing health-related telework grew to 3,849, an increase of more than 120 percent from 2002 in which there were 1,749. Health-related telework examples might include recovery after cancer related treatment or major surgery.
- **Third, Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS).** The 2004 FHCS was also updated to include questions on emergency planning. The FHCS will provide the employee perspective on emergency preparedness in the agencies.

Through our cadre of Human Capital Officers, OPM provides hands-on, one-on-one assistance to the agencies. On numerous occasions during the past year, OPM provided consultation and support to agencies challenged by weather and traffic disruptions. Events such as the Presidential Inauguration, President Reagan's funeral procession, the annual meeting of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund, as well as countless weather-related and other unscheduled situations are just a few examples of activities that may result in street closings, agency closings and/or early dismissals. In these instances, telework arrangements empowered agencies to effectively continue their operations and secure the safety of Federal employees. For agency offices located outside of the Washington Metropolitan Area, we have established a communication network through the FEBs. OPM has designated a single point of contact who works with FEBs and Federal Executive Associations (FEA) on emergency planning matters. This individual is equipped with a laptop and remote access, blackberry and mobile phone to ensure an effective system of communications with the FEBs and FEAs throughout the country.

OPM's COOP Planning

As part of OPM's efforts to improve its own COOP planning and meet its essential mission-critical function of providing human capital and related information to Executive agencies, we have taken the following steps.

- In July 2004, OPM signed agreements with the General Services Administration (GSA) for their Bowie, Maryland and Fairfax, Virginia Telework Centers to provide 10 spaces at each location to be used for COOP (total of 20)
- In the event of COOP, OPM is provided with 10 spaces at each site for up to 30 days
- OPM has 1 seat available at each site weekly to be used for training and orientation
- OPM has identified staff members who would deploy to each location for COOP, and several orientation sessions have been completed. Computer connectivity has been established and tested for each individual
- COOP members assigned to the Telework Centers have been provided entry cards which provide 24/7/365 access
- OPM is issuing government calling cards to COOP members to provide for long distance telephone service
- Offices and Divisions that will use the Telework Centers for COOP have been provided opportunity to identify and store appropriate reference materials at both locations in order to be equipped to carry out essential operations
- OPM will conduct a full COOP deployment later this year and use our Telework Centers as COOP sites. Observers will be assigned to each location to identify issues for follow up as necessary.

OPM has established an agency COOP Working Group (CWG) that includes representatives from all Offices and Divisions to exchange information and address continuity of operation issues. These representatives are all fully equipped with the latest technology innovations and are able to fully function in a virtual office at a moment's notice. The agency is an active member of the Interagency COOP Working Group and is Chairing the Subgroup on Human Capital. OPM has also implemented a new system that streamlines emergency notification for our key personnel and COOP team members. The system is tested on a regular basis.

Conclusion

Last year, this Committee convened hearings to determine the state of telework programs and policies in the Federal Government with particular emphasis on emergency preparedness and COOP. In the aftermath of the September 11 tragedies, telework clearly attracted greater attention by Federal managers as an essential element in agencies' emergency planning efforts and telework has been integrated into the Federal Government's COOP Plans. Today, OPM believes agencies recognize telework must be considered an essential element of COOP planning and implementation because it:

- **Ensures minimal disruption to agency operations both during COOP operations and in dealing with possible threats.** In the event of COOP activation, telework enables agencies to restart their business operations expeditiously and systematically with employees that have access to resources via technology at home or at telework centers.
- **Assures Federal employees that managers and leaders view their safety as paramount and fosters an environment of trust which is essential for mobilizing employees in times of emergencies.** The need to disseminate critical information and sustain employee confidence is crucial in having employees do the right things which facing threats or other work disruptions.

In summary Chairman Davis, OPM has been a leading advocate of the need to better prepare our Federal workforce in order to cope with any possible crisis which could affect our Federal workers and Government operations. In addition, we are grateful for the attention that this committee has directed to Federal Agencies' COOP plans. With over 1.8 million non-postal executive branch employees spread across the agencies, each with a distinct mission, we simply must incorporate employee safety with business needs. OPM's goal is to make telework an integral part of agency operations, rather than a "new" or "special" program. I assure you that OPM will continue to champion telework as a key human capital strategy and do everything possible to facilitate its incorporation into agency overall operations and emergency preparedness planning and use.

I would be glad to answer questions you may have.